

SECTION 1

Pre-2002 editions of this volume have noted a consistent decline in police reported motor vehicle crashes, however, with the implementation of the new crash reporting system in 2002 police reported crashes increased dramatically. With 2003 being the first full year of utilization of the new crash report, the number of reported crashes continued to rise. Although the reported crashes in 2003 and 2004 were stable, in 2005, the number of new reports increased 3% to 14,252 and 2% in 2006 to 14,549. Accordingly, the crash rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled increased only slightly to 189.2 from the 2005 level, however it was the highest level during the study period from 1997-2006. Fatal crashes increased 13% with 77 reported in 2006 compared to 63 in 2005.

Vermont continues to experience a lower incidence of reported crashes and injuries than does the country as a whole. Despite the large increase in reported crashes, the Vermont crash rate at 189 was still below the U.S. rate of 198 crashes per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. In previous editions of this volume, the downward trend in crashes and crash rates in Vermont were parallel to the decline in national trends of the past two decades, however, with the new crash reporting system in place it will be interesting to see the pattern between the two in future years.

Several important qualifications affect the data provided in this report and should be kept in mind when drawing conclusions about the incidence and characteristics of motor vehicle crashes in Vermont. Most important is that the analysis reported here is based only on crash reports filed by law enforcement with the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and is, therefore, not reflective of the total number of crashes occurring on Vermont's highways in 2006. It must be noted, however, that police reported crashes generally represent a subset of the more serious property damage crashes, most injury crashes, and a complete accounting of fatal crashes.

Missing from the analyses contained in this and subsequent sections are crashes reported to the Department of Motor Vehicles by operators only. In 2005, there were 4,530 operator reported crashes. A significant statutory change was implemented on July 1, 1995 with an increase in the level of damage at which an operator is required to report a crash to DMV from \$500 to \$1,000. From 1995-2002, the number of operator reported crashes fluctuated from a low of 7,440 in 2002 to a high of 8,772 in 2000 with the average for these years around 8,000. Since 2003, the operator reported crashes dropped to about half the level for the previous years with an average of about 4,000 reported for 2003, 2004 and 2005. In 2006, the number dropped to 3,480.

The proportion of 2006 crashes for which both police and operator reports were filed at DMV was 80.7% slightly higher than the 2005 percent of 76. The 2006 number is the highest level during the period of analysis of 1997-2006. It is important to note that in recent years some law enforcement agencies have instituted policies for investigating property damage crashes only when they exceed a higher monetary damage value, most typically \$1,500-\$3,000. Additionally, some departments have eliminated property damage levels as a guiding factor in submitting a police report to the DMV.

The number of fatalities in Vermont increased to 87 in 2006, a 19% increase from the number in 2005 (73). The number of people injured remained high at 4,144 this was an increase of 1% from the 2005 number of 4,085. The injury rate and the injury crash rate both increased slightly in 2006. This suggests that the pattern of decline in the number of people injured from 1995 to 2001 was a function of police reporting practices rather than gains made in highway safety.